

'UP THE COUNTRY.'



CHAPTER I.

Camp, Umritzir, Dec. 10, 1838.

It has just occurred to me in dating this letter, that we are very near the end of '38, and in '39 we may begin to say, 'the year after next, we shall go home.' I never know exactly where we are in our story, for I keep so many anniversaries it puts me out. So many people have married, and died, and gone home, that it is really incredible that we should have been here so long, and yet are kept here still. Something must be done about it, because it is a very good joke; but life is passing away, and we are in the wrong place. It has now come to that pass that we are in a foreign country from India, and that crossing the Sutlej is to be called going home again. You see how it is! Our first principles are wrong, and G. says, with a placid smile, 'If

Shere Singh does not dine with us to-day, would it not be advisable to ask Hindû Rao?' Hindû Rao, being a Mahratta chief, a dependent on our Government, who has attached himself to our camp—not quite an idiot, but something like it, and in appearance like a plump feather-bed, with pillows for his head and legs—covered all over with chain armour and cuirasses, and red and yellow shawls; and he sits behind G. at table, expecting to have topics found and interpreted to him. Shere Singh has a great deal of fun; but natives at table are always a great *gêne*. I had only time to tell you of our arrival at Umritzir on Wednesday, and not of the show, which was really surprising. F. and I came on in the carriage earlier than the others, which was a great advantage; for the dust of fifty or sixty elephants does not subside in a hurry, and they spoil the whole spectacle. We met the old man going to fetch G. That is one of the ceremonies, naturally tiresome, to which we have become quite used, and which, in fact, I shall expect from you, when we go home. If the Maharajah asks G. to any sight, or even to a common visit, G. cannot stir from his tent, if he starves there till an 'istackball,' or embassy, comes to fetch

him. So this morning we were all dressed by candle-light, and half the tents were pulled down and all the chairs but two gone, while G. was waiting for Kurruck Singh to come seven miles to fetch him, and Kurruck Singh was waiting till the Governor-General's agent came to fetch *him*, and then the Maharajah was waiting till they were half-way, that he might fetch them all. Then, the instant they meet, G. nimbly steps into Runjeet's howdah, and they embrace French fashion, and then the whole procession mingles, and all this takes place every day now. If the invitation comes from our side, B. and the aides-de-camp act Kurruck Singh, and have to go backwards and forwards fifteen miles on their elephants. So now, if ever we are living in St. John's Wood, and you ask me to dinner in Grosvenor Place, I shall first send Giles down to your house to say I am ready; and you must send R., as your *istackball*, to fetch me, and I shall expect to meet you yourself, somewhere near Connaught Place, and then we will embrace and drive on, and go hand-in-hand in to dinner, and sit next to each other. If I have anything to say (which is very doubtful, for I have grown rather like Hindû Rao), I will mention it to Giles, who

will repeat it to Gooby, who will tell you, and you will wink your eye and stroke your hair, and in about ten minutes you will give me an answer through the same channels. Now you understand.

To return to this show. We drove for two miles and a half through a lane of Runjeet's 'goocherras,' or body guard. The sun was up and shining on them, and I suppose there was not one who would not have made the fortune of a painter. One troop was dressed entirely in yellow satin, with gold scarfs and shawls; but the other half were in that cloth of gold which is called kincob—the *fond* being gold and the pattern scarlet, or purple, or yellow; their arms were all gold—many of them had collars of precious stones; their shields and lances were all studded with gold. They have long beards down to their waists, and most of them had a silver, or gold tissue drapery, which they bring over their heads and pass round their beards to keep them from the dust. In the distance there was a long line of troops extending four miles and a half, and which after much deliberation I settled was a white wall with a red coping. I thought it could not possibly be alive; but it was—with 30,000 men. G. says old Run-

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jeet was very much pleased with his own display. Shere Singh dined with us again; but otherwise it was a day of rest.

Thursday we began poking about to find shawls and agate curiosities, which are supposed to abound at Umritzir; but our native servants are afraid of going into the bazaars, they say the Sikhs laugh at them and their dress; my man told me 'they are a very *proudly* people, me not much like; they say, "What this?" and "What that?" I say, "It Mussulmaun dress—if you not like, don't touch!" Then they say, "No city like our Umritzir!" I say, "I say nothing against your Umritzir; but then you never see anything else. If you come to *Calcut*, I show you beautiful things—ships that go by smoke, and fine houses." However, they are so proudly that now I pretend I no understand their Punjâbee, but I know what they mean.'

With all their '*proudliness*' they are very civil to our people, and told them that the Maharajah had proclaimed he would put to death anybody who maltreated any of the Governor-General's followers; or, as they expressed it, that 'he would cut open their stomachs'—very unpleasant, for a mere little incivility. In the

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afternoon he sent word he was going to show us the city and the famous Sikh temple, where he had consulted the oracle about his present alliance with us. This temple is the only thing the Sikhs are supposed to venerate in a religious way. After all the plans were settled, a grand schism sprang up in our camp about G.'s taking off his shoes, and parties ran very high; however, I believe it was settled that it was impossible he could ever take off his shoes, except for the purpose of going to bed; but then it was equally impossible to rebut Runjeet's great civility in letting us go to this temple at all, and it was not a question of state. Runjeet takes off his shoes and stoops down, and puts some of the dust on his forehead; it amounts to taking off a hat, and only answers to the same respect that we should wish anybody to pay on entering one of our own churches. So it ended in G.'s drawing a pair of dark stockings on over his boots, and the Sikhs made no objection. F. and I went in white shoes, and pretended to take off our dressing slippers from over them. All they really care about is, that their sacred marble should not be defiled by shoes that have trod the common streets. I am glad we went, and would

have given up my shoes and stockings too, for it.

The temple stands in an immense tank of holy water, and a narrow marble bridge leads to it. There is a broad walk all round the tank, and it is surrounded by palaces belonging to his principal sirdar, and by other holy buildings.

The temple is of pure gold; really and truly covered completely with gold, most beautifully carved, till within eight feet from the ground, and then there are pannels of marble inlaid with flowers and birds—very *Solomonish* altogether. There are four large folding-doors of gold. We walked round it, and then Runjeet took us in.

There was a large collection of priests, sitting in a circle, with the Grooht, their holy book, in the centre, under a canopy of gold cloth, quite stiff with pearls and small emeralds. The canopy cost 10,000*l.* Runjeet made G. and F. and me sit down with him on a common velvet carpet, and then one of the priests made a long oration, to the effect that the two great potentates were now brothers and friends, and never could be otherwise. Then G. made a speech to the same effect, and mentioned that the two armies had joined, and they could now conquer the whole

world; and Runjeet carried on the compliment, and said that here, the oracle had prompted him to make his treaty, and now they saw that he and the English were all one family. In short, you never saw two gentlemen on better terms with themselves and each other. G. presented 16,000 rupees, and they, in return, gave us some very fine shawls. I think, mine was scarlet and gold, but the Company's baboo twisted it up in such haste that I did not see it well.

When all this was over, Runjeet took us up to a sort of balcony he has in one corner of the square, and by that time the bridge, the temple, the minarets, everything was illuminated. Shere Singh's palace was a sort of volcano of fireworks, and large illuminated fish were swimming about the tank. It was a curious sight, and supposed, by those who know the Sikhs, to be a wonderful proof of confidence on Runjeet's part.

Yesterday my search for small agate curiosities was rather successful; and the shawls here are not *despicable* by any means, and very cheap, but I happen to have spent all my money. W. O.'s tent is the great harbour for merchants, but I have found out that I make my little bargains better if I can convey my merchant safely into my own tent.

They all went to a great review this morning, and we had Runjeet's French officers to dinner in the evening, besides the A.'s and C.'s; and then Shere Sing, and that darling little Pertâb, came again to dinner.

We had little Pertâb to sketch this morning, and he was very pleasant. I asked him to fix his eyes on Captain M., who was acting interpreter. After a time he began to fidget, and his stern old Sikh tutor (you don't want a Sikh tutor for your boys by chance?—if so, I can safely recommend this man for a remarkably good manner of teaching, besides having a beard half a yard long) reproved him for it. Pertâb declared he could not help it,—he was told to fix his eyes on M., and 'this is the way he moves his head,'—and then he mimicked M. turning from one to the other and interpreting, in such a funny little way. We gave him a diamond ring, which seemed to delight him.

In the evening we went to a garden half a mile off, where Runjeet is living, and where he was going to give us an evening fête. He had had the house actually built on purpose, and it was beautifully painted in an arabesque fashion, with small pieces of looking-glass let in, in

various patterns. The walks of the garden were all lined with those splendid soldiers.

I whispered to Major E., who was sitting on the other side of me, to ask if it would be wrong to step out of the house to look at these gorgeous people, as I had missed all the other opportunities of seeing them; and the old Maharajah did not wait to have the question explained—he delights to show off his soldiers. He jumped up, and took hold of my hand, and ambled out into the garden, and then made all the guards march by, and commented on their dresses, and he looked so fond of the old greybearded officers.

There is something rather touching in the affection his people have for him. The other day, in going through the city, it struck us all, the eagerness with which they called out 'Maharajah!' and tried to touch him, which is easy enough in these narrow streets, and the elephants reaching to the roofs of the houses.

When we had sufficiently admired the golden men, we all ambled back to our silver chairs, and then the drinking and nautching began. Nothing can be more tiresome! But he asked some very amusing questions of G., which I believe